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INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7128

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9750

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5563

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1684

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0002

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 6656

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001401

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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: FOREIGN VIEWS OF THAI GOVERNMENT EFFORTS IN THE DEEP SOUTH

REF: BANGKOK 1388 (MOSQUE ATTACK)

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶11. (C) The brutal June 8 attack by unknown perpetrators on a mosque in Narathiwat province (reftel) may set back efforts to ameliorate the conflict in southern Thailand. Over the past weeks, various foreign observers privately expressed divergent views about the likelihood and possible modalities of progress toward an effective peace process. Our contact at the Malaysian Embassy, speaking to us prior to a visit by Prime Minister Abhisit to Kuala Lumpur, said he did not believe Abhisit would seriously negotiate with militants without pressure from the U.S. He claimed Malaysia had no ability to stem the violence. A new peace broker, Juha Christensen, told us he was working to involve the military and southern Thais in some form of peace negotiations, and he felt the militants and the RTG were interested in moving forward on negotiations. Our colleagues at the European Commission (EC) worried that the RTG's bureaucracy would hinder efforts to improve conditions, but they praised the Foreign Minister's assistance to a European delegation visiting the Deep South.

¶12. (C) Comment: We understand our Malaysian contact's pessimism that Abhisit will not negotiate to end the conflict, but we note it is not universally shared, and we disagree that we should press hard for the RTG to negotiate with the insurgents; we can express support for a peaceful resolution, but we have to be careful not to appear to be weighing in strongly on a very sensitive domestic matter that the RTG does not want to "internationalize." Also, we give Abhisit the benefit of the doubt; the political space he has to work in is extremely limited, especially after this week's attack, and missteps on the South could deal a serious blow to his already fragile government. We find it difficult to assess the likelihood that Juha Christensen's initiatives (which appear separate from other facilitators' efforts to promote dialogue between the RTG and insurgents) will result in a breakthrough, but we find him open about his efforts and

hope on balance he is more likely to have a positive impact than a negative one. End Summary and Comment.

THE MALAYSIAN VIEW

¶3. (C) The Thai press reported positively on Prime Minister Abhisit's June 8 visit to Malaysia, lauding a reported agreement in principle by Abhisit and PM Najib Razak to make a joint visit to Thailand's Deep South to demonstrate a confluence of Thai and Malaysian interests. Weeks prior to Abhisit's visit to Kuala Lumpur, however, a Malaysian Embassy official privately expressed pessimism about the likelihood of Abhisit making meaningful progress toward ending violence in the South. On May 21, we met with Minister Counselor Roslan Rahman, the senior official at the Embassy of Malaysia who handles issues involving southern Thailand, at Roslan's request. Roslan's primary message throughout the meeting was that Abhisit needed to negotiate with the insurgents, and the U.S. should engage the Thais to convince them to enter into talks. Roslan lamented that some of Abhisit's public statements reflected a reluctance to negotiate. (Note: In a February al-Jazeera interview, to which Roslan referred, Abhisit refused to answer a direct question about whether his government would enter into a dialogue with the separatists. End note.) Roslan added that the RTG had not addressed with fundamental issues of justice and trust, and Abhisit was too beholden to the army to control its activities.

¶4. (C) Roslan told us that Malaysia had offered assistance with resolving the conflict to Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban earlier in the year, but the offer was turned down. Roslan believed the RTG was unwilling to agree to a Malaysian condition that the RTG commit completely to a

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negotiating process. Roslan added that although the Malaysian government could talk occasionally with some militants, it had no influence over them. To illustrate his point, he said that in 2006, in an effort to bring the situation under control, Malaysia hosted a meeting of militant leaders in Saudi Arabia and "demanded" that the violence stop; the meeting had little effect. The reality, according to Roslan, was that only Thailand could end the conflict. Roslan confided that Malaysia's cooperation with Thailand on the South included information and intelligence sharing but did not extend to providing the RTG with names of individuals suspected of involvement in the violence. He said providing names to the RTG would not bring the conflict anywhere closer to resolution.

¶5. (C) Roslan told us the USG should become more proactive in finding a solution to the southern conflict by engaging the RTG and asking them to lean forward on serious negotiations. He said only the U.S. had enough leverage with the RTG to get it to enter into talks. Roslan also suggested the U.S. should try to encourage the separatists to negotiate as well, adding that the administration of President Obama was viewed favorably in southern Thailand, where hostility toward the U.S. was beginning to fade.

ANOTHER PEACE BROKER WEIGHS IN

¶6. (C) We met on May 15 with Juha Christensen, a Finnish businessman turned peace broker and one of the more recent additions to the cast of players angling for a piece of the southern Thailand peace negotiations. (Christensen's efforts seem separate from all others to promote dialogue.) Christensen was as optimistic that the RTG would talk to the insurgents as Roslan was pessimistic. An entrepreneur who claims close ties to Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla, Christensen was (according to press reports) successful as a mediator and advisor to the Aceh Monitoring Mission in Aceh, Indonesia. Christensen told us he began working on the conflict in southern Thailand at the behest of the Thai army,

and his efforts focused primarily on bringing the military into a peace process. He said he recently briefed General Anupong, PM Abhisit, and the parliamentary committee on the Deep South on his efforts. Christensen said that Anupong neither offered him support nor sought to stop Christensen's efforts, but he was "getting positive signals" from others in the RTG (NFI) on prospects for some type of negotiations. Christensen said he believed that all tracks of negotiations were worthwhile -- even if all the right players are not initially involved. Once talks acquire momentum, the right people will eventually come to the table. (Comment: We believe Christensen may underestimate the importance of involving the right people in talks, especially because the identities and roles of key Thai insurgents remain unclear. End Comment.)

¶17. (C) Christensen said he had spoken with southern insurgents who were eyeing Acehnese gains in political legitimacy and self-governance that followed the Acehnese settlement with the government of Indonesia. Southern Thai militants wanted the same things as the Acehnese, he claimed.

Commenting on the difficulty the RTG has with concepts of autonomy in discussing southern Thailand, Christensen said he was advising the Thais to describe possible changes in governance in the South in alternative language, such as "administrative adjustments," instead of "special zones" or autonomy. He also said he was working with the RTA on ways to give the Malay Muslims more cultural space -- specifically, allowing them to use their own language. He did not believe that immediately confronting human rights issues would be productive, and putting them first on the agenda could make a peace deal impossible.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION: THE BUREAUCRACY IS THE PROBLEM

¶18. (C) European Commission diplomats briefed us on May 29 about a recent trip to southern Thailand by the Heads of

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Mission (HoM) of a number of European Embassies. The Europeans told us they did not perceive any improvement in the situation in the South, and the Thai government bureaucracy may be the biggest obstacle to forward movement. Theodor Proffe from the German Embassy explained that in February, when PM Abhisit said his government would take a more "civil" approach to dealing with the South, the EC decided to send a delegation to southern Thailand to support this approach. When the EC approached the Thai MFA about the trip, the MFA tried to block the visit or turn it into a low-profile affair that would involve only lunch and photo opportunities. Frustrated with the MFA, the HoMs approached Foreign Minister Kasit, who then gave specific instructions to both the military and the MFA to assist the EC. Proffe said Kasit told them they could go where they liked and that the RTG "had nothing to hide." In the end Proffe said, the visit was such a large affair (with 15 people from the EC and 21 from the RTG) that little substance came out of it, but he remained impressed by Kasit's willingness to help.

ENTWISTLE